

# Why a Bidet Is Better Than Toilet Paper

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## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › Bidet use increased during the COVID-19 pandemic because of toilet paper shortage. Sales continue to grow annually, indicating rising awareness and acceptance of this bathroom device
- › Originating in 18th-century France, bidets have evolved from standalone units to modern toilet attachments with features like adjustable water pressure and temperature
- › A 2022 survey revealed a growing interest in bidets among Americans, particularly among younger generations, despite limited knowledge and experience with the devices
- › Bidets offer superior hygiene compared to toilet paper, reducing hand contamination and the risk of spreading intestinal infections
- › Toilet paper production has significant environmental impacts, including deforestation and water pollution. Bidets present a more eco-friendly alternative to traditional paper-based hygiene practices

One of the most surreal yet unforgettable events during the start of the COVID-19 pandemic was the nationwide shortage of toilet paper.

When lockdown restrictions were implemented in March 2020 and citizens were told to stock up on essentials, many people immediately went to their nearest supermarkets to hoard toilet paper, creating a massive shortage that lasted for months. However, others decided to do something smart instead – they purchased bidets.

In a CNN article,<sup>1</sup> James Lin, founder of bidetking.com, a website that sells various types of bidets and accessories, says they sold out all their bidets during the pandemic, which helped their business grow exponentially. And each year, their sales grow at least 20% to 30%, pointing to the increasing awareness about this handy bathroom device.

## **The Origins of the Bidet – An 18th Century Invention**

A bidet works by aiming a small stream of water around your nether regions to rinse off any fecal material left after a bowel movement. Although there's still some debate among historians on the exact origins of the bidet, many are leaning toward the French as the original makers of this device.<sup>2</sup>

The name, "bidet" (pronounced "bee-day") is French for "pony," and was coined in 1710 by a French publication. It refers to the straddling position needed when using the primitive designs of this bathroom installation – as if mounting a pony. The first bidets were artisanal ceramic or porcelain bowls supported by wooden legs.

Interestingly, bidets were more commonly used by aristocrats. In addition to their chamber pot, they typically have a bidet as a separate furniture.<sup>3</sup> According to the blog *Many Bidets*:<sup>4</sup>

*"After handling their business, the wealthy French aristocrats would clean themselves in a porcelain bowl with beautiful inlay and paintings work laid into an ornate mahogany chair.*

*This was one of the first times in recorded history that toilets were designed to be nice. Up until then, even the wealthiest kings and queens of the world still had to use a traditional stone or wood-carved latrine and were lucky if they had some extra water for plumbing purposes."*

Napoleon Bonaparte even brought his own bidet in all his travels. It was made of silver, as opposed to porcelain, as the silver acted as a natural antimicrobial, keeping it clean and sanitary.<sup>5</sup>

Today, bidet designs have come a long way. While there are still traditional standalone units, modern versions now can be directly attached to your toilet. Some are simple handheld sprays, which are inexpensive and allow you to point the nozzle at the area you want to clean. Other more sophisticated, fully automated varieties boast of features like motion-sensing lids, automatic flushing, adjustable water pressure and/or temperatures and odor-neutralizing capabilities.

But while bidets are a mainstay in many European countries, most Americans are yet to catch up to this trend; still, there's progress on this, with many U.S. adults, particularly younger generations, showing a growing interest in this cleaning device.

## **Americans Are 'Clueless but Curious' About Bidets**

A 2022 survey<sup>6</sup> commissioned by Bio Bidet by Bemis, a manufacturer of bidet and accessories, found that despite being unfamiliar with bidets, Americans now have a growing interest in them. The survey, which consisted of over 1,000 respondents, found that only 12% are knowledgeable about bidets, while 71% had never used one. Nevertheless, they did note that:<sup>7</sup>

- 60% would rather buy a bidet than a non-fungible token (NFT)
- 45% have done some research recently regarding different bidet options
- 44% agree that bidets are a "sleek and luxurious" addition to a bathroom
- 60% avoid using public bathrooms to poop; 41% would like to see bidets in more public bathrooms

They also found that younger age groups were more likely to associate bidets with wealth and cleanliness, while older crowds say that bidets are "out of the ordinary." Younger Americans were also more likely to have used or owned a bidet. James Amburgey, director of Business Unit Development at Bio Bidet by Bemis, says:

*"Bidets are a superior hygienic and environmental solution, which is why we're so passionate about them. This survey points to the fact that, even though*

*Americans don't know much about bidets, their associations are positive – especially among younger generations.”<sup>8</sup>*

## **Using a Bidet Gives You a Clean, Refreshing Feeling**

But what's so great about bidets anyway? Think of it this way – when you accidentally step on dog poop, do you simply wipe the bottom of your shoe with toilet paper? Or do you wash it to make sure that all the remnants of the poop are removed? No doubt that you'll settle for the second option.

A bidet works the same way; instead of just wiping your bottom with a piece of paper, it applies a gentle yet pressurized stream of water to remove residual excrement. This is far different from using toilet paper, which has a dry, rough texture that can chafe your nether regions (where the skin is more sensitive), especially if done aggressively. Commenting in a HuffPost article,<sup>9</sup> health and wellness expert Dr. Farhan Malik says:

*“The direct application of water for post-toilet cleansing removes residual fecal matter more effectively than toilet paper alone. This can help prevent skin irritation and inflammation in the genital area. The gentle, targeted spray of water also reduces excessive wiping and tugging, which can lead to discomfort.”*

In some areas in Europe, it's even customary to have a "bidet towel" in home bathrooms. Basically, this is a washable, reusable towel that's exclusively used to dry yourself off after washing with a bidet. It's usually hung beside the bidet (away from the hand towels, obviously) and virtually eliminates the need to use toilet paper.

*“Bidet users frequently report a sense of improved hygiene and cleanliness. Overall, bidet users highlight a refreshed and revitalized feeling after using the device,”* Malik says.<sup>10</sup>

Using a bidet also removes the risk of getting fecal matter on your hands. In a 2022 study<sup>11</sup> conducted by Japanese researchers, they found that the number of microbes

transferred to the hands after defecating was significantly lower when cleaning up with a bidet compared to wiping with toilet paper. According to the study:

*"Microbial contamination from feces on the hands after defecation is estimated to have a major impact on the spread of intestinal infections such as norovirus gastroenteritis, hepatitis A, Salmonella infections, Clostridioides difficile-related infections, and enterohemorrhagic E. coli infections.*

*For example, there have been outbreaks resulting from food handlers who are infected or asymptotically infected with norovirus and do not sufficiently wash or disinfect their hands after using the toilet, and then handle food. In most cases, outbreaks of communal diarrhea are often attributed primarily to the contamination of the hands.*

*With basic understanding rooted in the understanding of how pathogen spreads from the fecal – oral route, the utmost importance on the method for maintaining hand hygiene after defecation has been considered important, and it is also important to prevent fecal contamination of the hands after defecation as much as possible.*

*In this study, the use of a bidet toilet was demonstrated to be effective in reducing microbial contamination of the fingers after defecation. We provide evidence that a bidet toilet is effective at preventing the spread of intestinal infections."<sup>12</sup>*

## **There's Nothing Sanitary or Eco-Friendly About Toilet Paper**

Did you know that humans use 42 million tons, equivalent to 184 billion rolls, of toilet paper every year? To produce this much, 712 million trees are cut down, and 1,165 million tons of water and 78 million tons of oil are used.<sup>13</sup> This means that forests are being destroyed and millions of animals lose their homes, all to create a product that's literally flushed down the toilet.

What's more, toilet paper is bleached to give it a "sanitary" appearance. Typically, paper produced from wood is brown and turn yellow over time, but to keep this from happening, the paper industry resorts to chlorine and chlorine dioxide to bleach toilet paper.

As a result, carcinogenic chemicals like furans and dioxins are created. Every time these materials are flushed down your toilet, they end up polluting not only the waterways, but also the soil, air and food supply. According to a factsheet from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA):<sup>14</sup>

*"Dioxins and furans can cause a number of health effects. The most well-known member of the dioxins/furans family is 2,3,7,8 TCDD. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has said that it is likely to be a cancer-causing substance to humans. In addition, people exposed to dioxins and furans have experienced changes in hormone levels.*

*High doses of dioxin have caused a skin disease called chloracne. Animal studies show that animals exposed to dioxins and furans experienced changes in their hormone systems, changes in the development of the fetus, decreased ability to reproduce and suppressed immune system."*

## **'Forever Chemicals' Are Lurking in Toilet Paper**

Per- and polyfluoroalkyl chemicals (PFAS) are endocrine-disrupting chemicals that are widely used in manufacturing processes. Also known as "forever chemicals," these are used in commercial applications due to their stain-, water- and oil-resistant properties.

However, PFAS have been linked to a variety of adverse health effects, including hormone and metabolic disorders. They have also been found to interfere with fertility, growth and development in young children.<sup>15</sup> PFAS are now everywhere, which is why it's not surprising that toilet paper also harbors these toxic chemicals.

A 2023 study<sup>16</sup> looked at how toilet paper use contributes to PFAS in wastewater. The researchers analyzed toilet paper and wastewater sludge for 34 different PFAS and

detected six types in the toilet paper samples. These include:

Perfluorohexanoic acid (PFHxA)	Perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA)
Perfluorodecanoic acid (PFDA)	6:2 fluorotelomer phosphate diester (6:2 diPAP)
6:2/8:2 fluorotelomer phosphate diester (6:2/8:2 diPAP)	8:2 fluorotelomer phosphate diester (8:2 diPAP)

*"In both toilet paper and wastewater sludge, 6:2 fluorotelomer phosphate diester (6:2 diPAP) was the most prevalent PFAS detected, and toilet paper usage was estimated to contribute from 6.4 to 80  $\mu\text{g}$ /person/year of 6:2 diPAP to wastewater – water systems. Our results suggest that toilet paper should be considered as a potentially major source of PFAS entering wastewater treatment systems," the researchers said.<sup>17</sup>*

Just recently, Mamavation also conducted a report on PFAS contamination in toilet paper. They tested different brands for PFAS and found that 4 out of 17 products had traces of these forever chemicals. You can read more about their report in [this article](#).

## **A Bidet Offers Superior Cleaning and Comfort**

It's clear that bidets are the way to go for a more hygienic and eco-friendly bathroom routine, yet many people are still on the fence about adopting this habit. One reason is because they are concerned about the water being splashed on your bottom – it could splash on the floor or on your clothes, creating a mess.

However, this is a basic problem with an easy solution; you just need to make minor adjustments to your bidet unit to avoid making a mess. If you follow proper bathroom etiquette as well, this wouldn't be an issue.

Still, these minor drawbacks are nothing if you consider the long-term benefits you'll get from a bidet. Plus, with the money you save from buying toilet paper, a bidet will pay for

itself in no time. You can rest easy, knowing you're helping save valuable environmental resources while reducing pollution.

*"Often, bidet sales spread just through word of mouth. Once one person is converted to the new method of bathroom sanitation, they want their friends and family to join the club. And many of those customers often become entrenched rather than transient," CNN notes.<sup>18</sup>*

## Sources and References

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